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Socialization and development of the work ethic among adolescents and young adults

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Abstract

Work ethic is part of a broader field of attitudes, identified as cultural conservatism. The results of this longitudinal study—three repeated measurements with 620 adolescents and one of their parents as participants—show that parents' social economic status and educational level are associated with their cultural conservatism, and with the educational level and cultural conservatism of their children. During adolescence, parents effectively transfer their own cultural (non-)conservatism to their children. These socialization factors of adolescent cultural conservatism and adolescent educational level are important determinants of their work ethic. Lower educational level and higher cultural conservatisms of adolescents predict a stronger work ethic. Work ethic is a stable type of attitude, with work ethic at a younger age strongly predicting work ethic at a later age.

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Keywords: Work ethic; Political attitudes; Socialization; Adolescence

1. Introduction

This study explores the social transmission and development of work ethic during adolescence and young adulthood. We examine the extent to which socialization concerning the fundamental value of work is part of the transfer of a broader set of political attitudes from parents to children, and we discuss how social class and education affect this process. Furthermore the theme of individual development of

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this ethos through adolescence and young adulthood is addressed. In a longitudinal design we trace the way in which the notion of the value of work becomes a steady feature of a system of political attitudes during this part of the life course.

2. Work ethic

Work ethic should be distinguished from related concepts like work motivation, work attitudes or job satisfaction. In his seminal study *Die Protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus* (The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism) (1904/05) Weber considered the following elements to be characteristic of the Protestant work ethic (PWE): work is a central, religiously legitimated fact of life; it is man's duty to work hard; a rational attitude to life and good time planning serves man's diligence; success is important; consumption and leisure should be treated with a degree of suspicion; caring for others and good citizenship are civil duties (ter Bogt, 1999). By Weber's definition work ethic is a multidimensional construct and it has been operationalized as such in the psychological research of the last four decades (Furnham, 1990). In an important piece of research Miller, Woehr, and Hudspeth (2002) constructed and validated new scale to measure work ethic. Their measure is a multidimensional inventory of the concepts originated by Weber.

Contrary to these multidimensional approaches, Raaijmakers (1987) and ter Bogt (1999) focused on one key element of work ethic. Weber stated that the central point of an *ethos* of work consists of the idea that one *has* to work in order to lead a purposeful life and *so should others*. Raaijmakers (1987) and ter Bogt (1999) took elements from Weber's concept of work ethic and designed a scale for the measurement of the contemporary variant of the classic work ethic. This one-dimensional instrument measures to what extent work and a regular job represent core life motives, and, to what extent work and a steady job are more significant than leisure time. It tries to assess work as a basic value: no matter what one's motivation to work is—money, power, social contacts—no matter if one likes certain aspect of a job or not, work ethic precedes these attitudes and evaluations as a core imperative that one *should* work.

3. Work ethic and conservatism

Weber (1904/05) himself connected the Protestant work ethic (PWE) with bourgeois values; work ethic was therefore in the first instance a concept that was embedded in conservative economic ideals about the distribution of wealth and power. He believed that the PWE trickled down to the lower strata of the working population, most of which started to believe that hard work, thriftiness, and sober consumption were key features of a decent way of living. Authors such as Bernstein (1980), Buchholz (1983), Hobsbawm (1986) and Thompson (1986) do not refute the political function of this duty-to-work ideology, but they do dispute the general support for that idea. In their view, work ethic has always been and has remained a matter for the conservative part of the elite and middle class. Especially conservative

politicians and ideologues conceive the Victorian age as a 'golden era' and lament 'the decline of work ethic in modern times' (Furnham, 1990).

However, other sociological and historical research shows that even in the 19th century there existed no longer an automatic link between work ethic and (economic) conservatism. Marx (1867/1977) and his followers turned labor into a fundamental human category; only in and through work persons could give expression to their inner self. Parts of the working classes adopted the work ethic as a positive attribute, and decent labor and humane working hours became stakes in political battles. As a result, in the labor movement the work ethic became associated with an economic non-conservative ideology (e.g., Piven & Cloward, 1971). Historian Walvin (1987) describes how a significant part of the lower-middle and working classes tried to stabilize and improve their social position by working hard and saving their money penny by penny, and this suggests that even in the 19th century work ethic by no means was a uniform 'bourgeois-conservative' ideal.

More recent, in the 80s and 90s of the 20th century, psychological measures of work ethic (re-)established the link between work ethic and conservative attitudes (Atieh, Brief, & Vollrath, 1987; Feather, 1984; Furnham, 1984). However, discussing the association between Wilson's (1973) general measure of conservatism and work ethic, Furnham (1990) concludes that both conservatism and work ethic are multifaceted concepts. While significant correlations between the two have been reported, it remains unclear which aspects of conservatism and work ethic are responsible for the association.

As early as 1973, Rokeach maintained that it is too unsophisticated to define political attitudes in a simple left/right or progressive/conservative classification. Researchers in the Netherlands also expounded moral and social attitudes in two independent dimensions. Middendorp (1979, 1991) followed Rokeach in dividing political attitudes into the domains left/right and libertarian/conservative. We follow the conceptualization used by Felling, Peters, and Schreuder (1983) for the same dimensions: *economic conservatism* and *cultural conservatism*. Economic conservatives feel that existing economic conditions—liberal market economy—should not be changed. Differences in income, status and wealth are justified and the labor movement, be it socialist parties or unions, should not become a dominant social force. Independent of these types of attitudes relating to economics and power, a second field of attitudes can be distinguished. As did Rokeach before, Felling and his colleagues note that life style issues and moral judgments about the way people should lead their lives form a different attitudinal field of political-cultural orientations. Cultural conservatism can be described as a traditionalistic outlook on life regarding social and familial roles of men and women, the status of 'own' and 'foreign' culture, and the rights of gays and other minority groups with non-mainstream lifestyles. In empirical research it is operationalized as a combination of a non-egalitarian view of male-female relationships, suspicion towards immigrants and their culture, and an aversion of relationships and forms of cohabitation other than the civil marriage (Middendorp, 1979, 1991; Vollebergh, 1991; Vollebergh, Iedema, & Meeus, 1999).

Work ethic has been linked to conservatism, but it is unclear if it is embedded in economic or cultural conservatism. On the one hand work ethic has been represented

as an ideology of the economic conservative elite to pacify an unwilling mass of workers, on the other, a high regard of work has always been present in the labor movement as well. Furthermore, work ethic may be part of a traditionalistic worldview with a longing for Victorian values and therefore embedded in a cultural conservative ideology, however, even nowadays young people not qualified as traditionalistic seem to be aware of the importance of work as a device for giving meaning to life (Raaijmakers, 1987; ter Bogt, 1999).

The first question of this study, then, is: *Is the work ethic of adolescents and young adults embedded in either economic or cultural political orientations?* The second and associated question is: *Does that work ethic have a conservative or a non-conservative (economic or cultural–political) character?*

4. Socialization and the development of the work ethic

A number correlates of the work ethic of adolescents have already been reported (for an overview, see Furnham, 1990; ter Bogt, 1999). Nevertheless, little is known about the transmission of work ethic from parents to their children. In the early 60s, McLelland (1961) described how the support and encouragement of parents influenced adolescent achievement motivation. Cherrington (1980) found that the children of parents who themselves had had a disciplined upbringing seemed to have a higher work ethic. Furnham (1987) found a significant correlation of .24 between the work ethic of mothers and their children, but no correlation between that of fathers and their children. De Witte (1995) reported a similar correlation of .30 between the ethic of mothers and children, but he also failed to find the same correlation between the ethic of fathers and their children.

A strong case for the environment specific socialization and development of occupation-related values comes from the work of Melvin Kohn. In his classic 1963 formulation Kohn states that values and personality are affected by class position. Both education and occupational status of parents influence their conformity, sense of self-direction, and well-being. Working in environments with close supervision and routinized work of low complexity is associated with lower sense of self-direction and higher conformity. Kohn, Slomczynski, and Schoenbach (1986) later showed that parents transfer these class-related attitudes to their children. Lower educated, working class parents prepare their children for the inflexible working environment they are likely to meet and stress conformity, while middle class parent with their high education prepare their children for the occupational level they will probably secure and stress self-directedness.

Research in the British cultural studies tradition exemplified by the Birmingham Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) confirms this notion of class-related socialization. In his seminal ethnographic study of working class 'lads' Willis (1977) describes young people living in a subcultural environment that blocks upward mobility. Both parents and peers are wary of the concept of improving one's social position by trying to succeed in school, resulting in a set of anti-school attitudes. As failing within the educational system is the rule, young people get used

to the idea that manual work is their destiny. According to Willis this is why ‘working class kids get working class jobs’ and the associated tough work ethic.

In the study of work motivation and expectancies researchers have shown that parental aspirations convey to their children’s work expectations and career choices (Hoffman, Hofacker, & Goldsmith, 1992; Marjoribanks, 1987; Martin & Tuch, 1993). In their longitudinal study (1982–1986) Cotton, Bynum, and Madhere (1997) reported a positive link between the aspirations of parents and their children’s ‘intrinsic’ and ‘extrinsic’ motivation to work. Both types of work motivation seem to decline somewhat in the transfer from adolescence to young adulthood. In another longitudinal study (1987–1991) Van der Velde, Feij, and Taris (1995) on the other hand found that ‘extrinsic’ work values of 18–30-year-olds proved to have a stable value and ‘intrinsic’ work values increased between T1 and T2.

Pogson, Cober, Doverspike, and Rogers (2003) note that it is important to study the development of work ethic across the lifespan. Using Miller and Woehr’s work ethic inventory, they show that work ethic indeed differs across career stages. For instance, subjects in the early stage of their career score higher on the scales designed to measure a tendency to work hard and delay gratification.

However, most research focusing on work ethic itself is limited to cross-sectional and correlational studies and, to our knowledge, no longitudinal studies exist on pathways to an adult work ethic. This study explores the socialization and development of work ethic at an age that is crucial for the imprint of political attitudes, using structural equation techniques. In doing so we have taken environmental characteristics such as socio-economic status (SES), the educational level of the parents and that of their children as the background variables which determine the socialization of political ideas of parents and their children (Vollebergh, 1991). Taking into account the link between political attitudes and work ethic, we hypothesize that the political opinions of parents and, in second instance, those of adolescents and young adults serve as mediators between the environment of origin and the respondent’s own burgeoning work ethic. This study thus endeavors to chart one of the mechanisms whereby background translates itself into socialization and development.

The third question we try to answer in this study is: *How is the work ethic socialized, and what mediatory role do the parents’ political opinions play in that respect?* The fourth question is: *How does the work ethic develop during adolescence, and what mediatory role do the parents’ political opinions play in that respect?*

5. A model for the socialization and development of political orientations and work ethic

The upper half of Fig. 1 is a representation of the conceptual model of political socialization, enhanced with a third measurement index, previously published by Vollebergh, Iedema, and Raaijmakers (2001) and ter Bogt, Meeus, Raaijmakers, and Vollebergh (2001). In this model, social class and educational level of the parents determine the educational level of their children (see, for instance, Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970; Hunstinx, 1998). Social class and educational level are also important

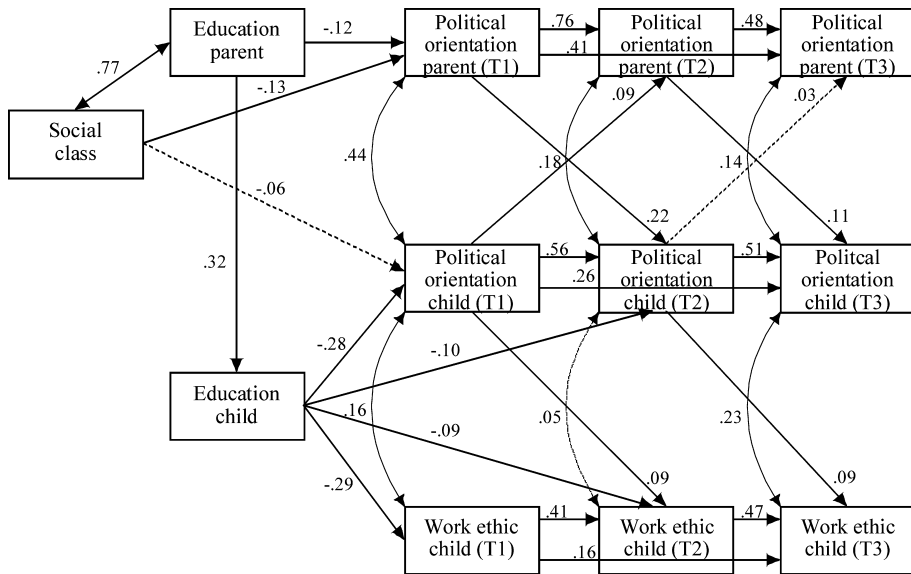


Fig. 1. Model of the socialization and development of the work ethic. *Note.* Broken lines indicate statistically insignificant paths ($p > .05$). The paths from Education child to Political orientation child (T2) and from Education child to Work ethic child (T2) were added to the conceptual model to reach satisfactory fit.

predictors of the political orientation of both parents and their children. The paths between social class and educational level on the one hand and the political orientations on the other hand in fact represent the socio-cultural heritage. Besides these paths the model also assumes correlations between the political orientations of the parents and those of their children at the individual moment of measurement (T1, T2, and T3). It would not be proper to suppose causal directions in these associations, so the reciprocal influences of the parents and their children at each of these three moments of measurement are shown as straightforward correlations in the model. That does not, however, apply to the reciprocal influence in time (i.e., from T1 to T2 and from T2 to T3): paths from parents to children, and vice versa, represent the possible influence on the other's political orientations. In that way, this model shows both the similarities in, and the reciprocal influence of the political orientations of parents and their children. The stability of the orientations of parents and their children is finally shown in the model by way of paths between orientations at the successive moments in time (between T1 and T2, between T2 and T3, and also between T1 and T3).

The modeling of the socialization and development of the work ethic as derived from the socialization and development of general political orientations, is portrayed in the lower half of the diagram. Besides educational level, previous political orientations are also considered to have an impact on the development of the work ethic. Again, the associations between the political orientations and the work ethic at the three moments of measurement are pictured as straightforward correlations and the

stability of the work ethic is represented by way of the paths between the work ethic at the successive moments in time.

Individual developmental and periodical effects are differentiated in this model in the sense that possible periodical effects are incorporated in the correlations between the scores of the parents and their children, assuming that both parents and children are affected by these periodical effects. Therefore, the cross-lagged paths in the model reflect the specific transfer from parents to children and from political orientations to the work ethic, corrected for these effects. Similarly, the paths between the work ethic scores at the successive measurements represent true developmental effects.

6. Method

The sample was derived from the USAD project (Utrecht Study on Adolescent Development), a panel longitudinal survey of Dutch adolescents, young adults and their parents. The first measurement in this study was carried out in 1991 among a sample of 3393 adolescents, that can be considered representative of the Dutch population of adolescents and young adults between 12 and 24 years of age (Meeus & 't Hart, 1993). Six hundred and twenty of these subjects together with one of their parents were interviewed three times, in 1991, 1994, and finally in 1997. There was only one substantial difference between the 620 adolescents selected for this study and the remaining 2773 subjects from the original sample: they were on average 2.5 years younger (16.2 as opposed to 18.7 years of age; t test: $t[3391] = -16.27$, $p < .001$, $d = .75$). None of the model variables resulted in either statistically (all p 's $> .001$) or substantially (effect sizes less than 'small,' see Cohen, 1988) significant differences. The results indicate that the final sample of 620 respondents was not systematically distorted with respect to the research variables and that a systematic bias in the results of our analyses is, therefore, not to be expected.

The random sample had a heterogeneous composition by age (average age of the adolescents and young adults in 1991 was 16.2 years, $SD = 3.2$, range 12–24; average age of the parents in 1991 was 44.4 years, $SD = 6.3$, range 31–67); gender (of the adolescents and young adults: 55% female and 45% male, and of the adults: 50% father and 50% mother); educational level (four possible levels with a median of 2 for both parents and children), and social class background (five possible levels with a median of 3). The gender-mix of the parent and child couples was also heterogeneous (24% of the dyads consisted of the combination father/son, 27% of father/daughter, 22% of mother/son, and 28% of mother/daughter). In 1991, 31% of the 620 adolescents were in paid employment, in 1994 this percentage was 54 and in 1997 it was 80. The majority of the other respondents were still attending school or were in higher education.

6.1. Measures

Political orientation and work ethic were measured by attitude scales consisting of 5-point Likert type items. Missing scores on items were replaced with their 'relative mean' (Raaijmakers, 1999).

Work ethic was measured on the basis of the abridged version of Raaijmakers' original scale (1987). The abridged version consists of 11 items, which together serve to measure the subject's attitude towards paid work and a steady job as anchors of a fulfilling life. The full list of items is as follows:

1. If you want to make something of your life, you will have to find a regular job.
2. For the future I can think of nothing better than a regular job.
3. It is important to build a career for yourself.
4. You can do useful things in your leisure time, but a regular job remains more important.
5. I only feel that I completely belong when I have a regular job.
6. A job gives substance and meaning to my life.
7. You live to work.
8. A regular job is the most important source of happiness.
9. Everything depends on having a regular job.
10. You have to spend your life working hard.
11. Without a job my future looks bleak.

A high score on this scale points to a traditional or classic work ethic. Examples: 'A job gives substance and meaning to my life' and 'You have to spend your life working hard.'¹ Reliabilities for the work ethic scale, as indicated by Cronbach's α 's were .86 in 1991 and .88 in 1994.

Political orientation was measured with six scales, which were offered to both the parents and their children in 1991, 1994, and 1997 in an identical form. The scales cover a wide range of political issues.

The scale 'Equality of income and possession' (3 items, derived from Middendorp, 1979), measures the degree to which people consider such equality to be an important political objective. An example of a scale item: 'The differences between high and low incomes should be less than it is now.' Cronbach's α varied between .84 and .86 for adolescents and their parents.

The scale 'Social justice and equality' (2 items, derived from Felling et al., 1983) measures the subject's pursuit of equality and democracy. An example of a scale item: 'It is important to promote a greater equality between all the people in society.' Cronbach's α varied between .76 and .86 for adolescents and their parents.

The scale 'Abortion and euthanasia' (2 items derived from Middendorp, 1979) measures the acceptability of the right to self-determination in respect of abortion and euthanasia. An example of a scale item: 'A woman should be able to have an abortion if she so wishes.' Cronbach's α varied between .78 and .84 for adolescents and their parents.

The scale 'Acceptability of alternative forms of co-habitation' (6 items derived from Van der Avort, 1988) measures the acceptance of forms of cohabitation other than that of the traditional family unit. An example of a scale item: 'I find it acceptable that a homosexual should live with a steady partner.' Cronbach's α varied between .83 and .90 for adolescents and their parents.

The scale 'Ethnocentrism' (4 items derived from Hagendoorn & Janssen, 1983) measures an intolerant attitude to other people, particularly to immigrants.

An example of a scale item: 'Unemployed Turks should be sent back to their own country.' Cronbach's α varied between .83 and .88 for adolescents and their parents.

The scale 'Sexism' (5 items derived from Vollebergh, 1986) measures an intolerant attitude towards the equality of women. An example of a scale item: 'A women should accept the authority of her husband.' Cronbach's α varied between .69 and .84 for adolescents and their parents.

As did Middendorp, we assume that these individual political attitudes in turn reflect more general political orientations on 'liberty' and 'equality.' The scale scores derived from the six scales were factor analyzed (principal component analysis with varimax rotation). In all cases (i.e., for both children and their parents, and in 1991, 1994, and in 1997) we found an unambiguous structure of two independent dimensions, confirming earlier research on Dutch adults carried out by Middendorp (1979, 1991) and Felling and Peeters (1984). This indicates that these measures were equivalent for both parents and their children. The first factor can indeed be described as 'Economic conservatism,' with factor loadings $>.80$ for the scores on the first two scales: 'Equality of income and possession' and 'Social justice and equality.' The second factor can be labeled 'Cultural conservatism' with factor loadings $>.80$ for the scores on the other four scales: 'Abortion and euthanasia,' 'Acceptability of alternative form of co-habitation,' 'Ethnocentrism,' and 'Sexism.' Both forms of conservatism were then operationalized as the two factor scores obtained from this analysis, whereby a higher score indicates a stronger economic or cultural conservative orientation.

In order to control for the equivalence of the measurement of these political attitudes across the age range covered by our study (i.e., from 12 to 24 years), we further analyzed whether this two-dimensional structure also existed within four different age groups of our sample (i.e., 12–14 years, 15–17 years, 18–20 years, and 21 years and older). The results clearly indicated that this was the case, in accordance with the results reported by Meeus (1987) concerning the same attitudes. Meeus (1987) also showed that the correlations of the scores on economic and cultural conservatism with several other attitudinal measures were quite similar for different age groups (range 12–24 years), thus suggesting construct equivalence of the measurement of conservatism across this age range.

Besides the work ethic and the political orientation, we also measured the educational level and the social class background of the respondents. The *educational level* of the young participants and their parents was divided into four categories, from low '1' to high '4'; *social class* referring to the social economic status (SES) of the family (in terms of profession/trade and income situation) was divided in to five categories from low '1' (unskilled labor) to high '5' (university level and 'upper class'). The scores of the first measurement of 1991 were used throughout as indicators of educational level and social class position.

7. Preliminary analyses

The model depicted in Fig. 1 may be best analyzed as a structural equation model, since it enables the simultaneous analysis of both socialization and developmental

effects, corrected for social class and education. The model was analyzed twice, using Amos (version 4, Arbuckle, 1999). In the first analysis the political orientations of the parents and their children were operationalized as their respective economic conservatism scores, in the second analysis as their respective cultural conservatism scores. In order to achieve the best possible fit, in both cases the conceptual model had to be adapted by adding two paths. The educational level of the adolescents and young adults proved to have a direct impact on their political orientation and work ethic at T2, underlining the impact of education. By comparing the results of both analyses it was possible to further analyze the relative effectiveness of these different political orientations in the prediction of the work ethic.

8. Results

8.1. Descriptive results

In order to gain an impression of the extent to which the various categories of adolescents embrace a traditional work ethic, a MANOVA (repeated measures) analysis was carried out on the work ethic scale scores using its repeated measurement as a 'within' factor and the background factors from the model illustrated in Fig. 1 (social class, educational level of parents and children) as 'between' factors. In this way it is possible to estimate average scores per category, corrected for the effect of the other factors in the model. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Corrected mean work ethic scores by social class, parental education, and education of respondent

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i> ^a	<i>SE</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
<i>Social class</i>						
1. Low	39	2.89	.097			
2.	265	2.93	.053			
3.	95	2.93	.057			
4.	178	2.90	.043			
5. High	43	2.98	.082	.36	.836	.002
<i>Education parents</i>						
1. Low	256	3.01	.050			
2.	200	2.91	.043			
3.	80	2.90	.072			
4. High	84	2.87	.067	1.00	.395	.005
<i>Education child</i>						
1. Low	115	3.22	.055			
2.	270	2.96	.038			
3.	167	2.85	.044			
4. High	68	2.65	.064	14.52	.000	.087

Note. Error *df* = 609.

^aBased on marginal means.

The table shows that the respondent's own educational level produces substantial differences between the categories, with an almost linear decrease in work ethic as educational level increases. Adolescents and young adults do not reject a work ethic with traditionalist connotations. On average they score close to the natural mean of the scale, with an overall average of 2.95.

There was a slight decrease in traditional work ethic between 1991 and 1997, mainly due to changes occurring between 1994 and 1997: 3.03 in 1991, 2.99 in 1994, and 2.85 in 1997. It seems unlikely that this change in work ethic can solely be attributed to an increased participation in the labor market during the period from 1994 to 1997, as a similar increase also occurred between 1991 and 1994 (from 31% in 1991 via 54% in 1994 to 80% in 1997). In order to check this result, the scores of those respondents whose labor market position had changed between the two measurements (from having no job to having paid employment) were compared with the scores of those respondents whose position had remained unchanged. No differences in shifts in work ethic could be observed, neither for period from 1991 to 1994, nor for 1994 to 1997 ($t[618] = -.46, p = .65$ and $t[618] = -1.08, p = .28$, respectively). For the sake of completeness we repeated this MANOVA analysis, adding gender and religion (in terms of both denomination and frequency of church attendance) to the between factors. This yielded highly comparable results, with no statistically significant effects of gender and religion.

8.2. The domain-specificity of work ethic

A first indication of the domain-specificity in the work ethic can be obtained from the correlation between the scores on the work ethic scale and the two factor scores used to measure economic and cultural conservatism of adolescents and young adults. The Pearson correlation coefficients of these relationships at the three moments of measurement (1991, 1994, and 1997) and presented in Table 2. Only the cultural conservatism scores show statistically significant and substantially positive

Table 2
Correlations of economic and cultural orientation scores with work ethic scores

	Political orientation			Work ethic		
	1991	1994	1997	1991	1994	1997
<i>Political orientation</i>						
1991	*	.69	.66	.26	.22	.21
1994	.44	*	.75	.17	.18	.20
1997	.33	.48	*	.20	.17	.30
<i>Work ethic</i>						
1991	-.08	.04	.00	*	.46	.41
1994	-.04	.05	.02	.46	*	.56
1997	-.06	.01	-.06	.41	.56	*

Note. Correlations of the cultural orientation are reported above the diagonal and correlations of the economic orientation below the diagonal. Coefficients in italics are statistically insignificant ($p > .05$); for the other coefficients: $p < .001$.

Table 3
Goodness of fit statistics of the basic models and the adapted models

	χ^2 (degrees of freedom), sign.	AGFI	RMSEA
<i>Basic models</i>			
Cultural model	$\chi^2(38) = 66.98, p = .003$.965	.04
Economic model	$\chi^2(38) = 89.69, p = .000$.953	.05
<i>Adapted models</i>			
Cultural model	$\chi^2(36) = 49.81, p = .063$.971	.02
Economic model	$\chi^2(36) = 77.45, p = .000$.957	.04

Note. AGFI, adjusted goodness of fit; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation.

correlations with the scores on the work ethic scale, indicating that a traditional work ethic is associated with cultural conservatism. The correlations with economic conservative opinions were neither statistically nor substantially significant.

Next we determined which model from Fig. 1 would provide the best fit: the model with political orientations operationalized as socio-economic attitudes (called the ‘economic model’), or the model in which these orientations were defined as cultural attitudes (the ‘cultural model’). The results are shown in Table 3.

A satisfactory fit could only be achieved using the (adapted) cultural model. This can be seen as another indication that the work ethic of adolescents and young adults is imbedded in cultural conservatism and not in economic conservatism.

Further information about the domain-specificity of work ethic can be obtained by examining the paths that are linked to work ethic in the model and that reflect the integration with, and dependence on, general political orientations. The correlation coefficients and standardized regression weights of these paths are presented in Table 4.

The results show that the work ethic has a substantial and statistically significant correlation with general cultural orientations. Economic orientations are not linked to the work ethic orientation, nor do they have any effect on its development.

8.3. Work ethic as conservatism

From the direction of the coefficients reported in Table 4, it can be deduced that the traditional work ethic is embedded in a general cultural conservative orientation: all coefficients relating to the relationships between general orientations and the work ethic have positive values in the cultural model.

8.4. The development of work ethic

The cultural model describes the relevant paths in the development of the work ethic in adolescents and young adults. On the one hand their educational level exerts an important influence, while on the other hand general cultural orientations have a direct impact, which in turn represents an indirect effect of education. The relative importance of these factors in the development of the work ethic can be seen from the data presented in Fig. 1 and Table 5. Fig. 1 shows the standardized coefficients

Table 4

Path coefficients of the adapted economic and cultural model

Path ^a	Standardized coefficients	
	Economic model	Cultural model
<i>Effect of education</i>		
Education child → work ethic (T1)	-.29*	-.29*
Education child → work ethic (T2)	-.12*	-.09*
<i>Stability</i>		
Work ethic (t1) → work ethic (T2)	.42*	.41*
Work ethic (t2) → work ethic (T3)	.48*	.47*
Work ethic (t1) → work ethic (T3)	.19*	.16*
<i>Similarity with political orientation</i>		
Orientation (T1) ↔ work ethic (T1)	-.03	.16*
Orientation (T2) ↔ work ethic (T2)	.05	.05
Orientation (T3) ↔ work ethic (T3)	-.07	.23*
<i>Effect of political orientation</i>		
Orientation (T1) → work ethic (T2)	.02	.09*
Orientation (T2) → work ethic (T3)	-.02	.09*

^a → refers to paths with associated standardized regression coefficients; ↔ refers to correlations with associated correlation coefficients.

* $p < .05$.

Table 5

Standardized total effects on the work ethic

Factors	Work ethic		
	1991	1994	1997
Social class	-.07	-.06	-.06
Education parents	-.09	-.08	-.06
Education child	-.29	-.24	-.18
Cultural orientation Child 1991		.09	.09
Cultural orientation Child 1994			.09
Work ethic 1991		.41	.36
Work ethic 1994			.47

of the paths between these factors and the work ethic, while Table 5 shows the coefficients which reflect the total effect of these factors on the work ethic.

These results show that in time the relative impact of the educational level of adolescents and young adults gradually decreases. Its place is taken by the effects of the child's cultural orientation, and the associated earlier work ethic. This shift can be seen as a demonstration of the internalization of external factors: the educational level of children loses its 'visible' impact, because its effects are integrated into the development of political attitudes and work ethic itself. As educational level in turn is a typical product of socialization, these results also indicate the importance of socialization for—at least—the initial development of the work ethic.

The embedding of the adolescent's and young adult's work ethic in cultural conservatism is demonstrated in the figure and the table by both the significant

Table 6
Standardized total effects on developmental conditions of the work ethic

Factors	Developmental conditions of the work ethic			
	Education child	Cultural orientation child		
		1991	1994	1997
Social class	.25	–.13	–.14	–.14
Education parents	.32	–.09	–.11	–.11
Education child		–.28	–.26	–.26
Cultural orientation parents 1991			.22	.22
Cultural orientation parents 1994				.11
Cultural orientation child 1991			.56	.55
Cultural orientation child 1994				.51

correlation with this orientation and the significance of the paths which illustrate that the work ethic is a direct effect of this orientation; this is apparent despite the significance of the paths between the various measurements of the work ethic (= stability), which in the model exert downward pressure on the values of the coefficients of the paths between cultural orientation and work ethic. Finally, the dependence of both work ethic and political attitudes on educational level further structures this embedding.

8.5. Socialization of work ethic

Social class, the education of the parents and those parents' own cultural orientations represent the socialization factors in the model. The fit of the cultural model in Fig. 1 provides a definite indication of the importance of socialization for the work ethic of adolescents and young adults. This is illustrated on the one hand by the impact of these factors on the educational level of the children and on the other hand by their influence on the child's general cultural orientations which function as mediators for the development of the work ethic. Table 6 presents the total effects of these factors on the educational level and the general orientations of adolescents and young adults which, in turn, have their own effect on the young person's work ethic.

While the total effects of socialization factors on the work ethic are modest (see Table 5), the results of Table 6 show that they do have a substantial impact on the conditions for the development of the work ethic, particularly the educational level of the adolescents and young adults. Their level of education thus represents the first level of the internalization of the social and cultural heritage. Subsequently, the educational level has a substantial impact on the cultural orientation of adolescents and young adults; which represents the second level of internalization.

9. Discussion

This paper describes a classic, one-dimensional variant of the work ethic: a deeply felt obligation or duty to work in combination with commitment to a steady job and

low appreciation of leisure time. By redefining a general notion of conservatism and dividing it into two domains of attitudes in the tradition of Rokeach (1973), and restricting ourselves to a core, one-dimensional notion of work ethic, we were able to specify into greater detail how 'conservatism' and 'work ethic' are associated. Our results indicate that work ethic is a component of the domain of cultural conservatism and that it is also conservative in nature. Another type of conservative attitudes, those on the distribution of wealth and power are not intrinsically linked to a high work ethic, i.e., economic conservatism does not predict work ethic. Traditionalism does: adolescents and young adults who believe that men and women have different social and familial roles, who are suspicious of immigrants and other minority groups, and perceive their cultures and lifestyles as a threat to mainstream society, tend to express a stronger work ethic than their less cultural conservative peers.

Longitudinal studies work ethic and the transfer of this type of attitudes from parent to children are scarce. We tried to model the transfer of attitudes from parents to their offspring as a dynamic process. The results indicate that work ethic is transmitted from parent to their children as part of a broader domain of cultural conservative attitudes and structural analysis shows that this transmission of political ideas is an ongoing process during adolescence. Parents remain important as shapers and fine-tuners of ideas of their children. Parental cultural conservatism is functioning as mediator between their SES and educational level, and the work ethic of their children. Socialization takes place in the social-environment-specific transfer of conservative ideas from parents to children, and those attitudes are, in turn, associated with the work ethic of those children.

The model not only conceptualizes the socialization of the work ethic, but also its development and stability during adolescence. In early adolescence young people already have a notion of the significance of hard work and structural analysis confirmed that this idea is a fairly stable one. The strength of work ethic at the time of the first measurement is a strong indicator of their attitudes in the future.

Socialization is more than the transfer of ideas. This study demonstrates, as have many in the past, that parents pass on their class and educational background to their children. Especially the educational background of the children was identified as a socialized factor and mediator of great importance. A strong work ethic is more prevalent in circles with a lower SES and lower educational levels of both the parents and their children, and especially the educational level of the adolescents is a significant predictor of work ethic.

One possible answer to the question why lower educated adolescents have a high work ethic is provided by the analyses presented here: because they grow up in a social environment with traditional attitudes, which they actively embrace. But, even so, this is not the complete answer. Besides mediation via traditional attitudes within a particular context, structural analysis shows that the educational level of the child also has an independent impact on his or her work ethic. Although we concluded that cultural conservatism definitely is of some influence, other mediators/factors must be relevant as well.

Level of education asserted itself as a strong predictor of work ethic. However, reflecting on the nature of this type of factor, one may conclude that it is an 'empty'

variable: it is a proxy for all kinds of cultural phenomena attached to school (ter Bogt, 1999). Our research indicates that school is important, only, we were not able to specify what it is, that gives educational level a prominent place in the socialization of attitudes, or, to be more specific, why young people with less education have a higher work ethic. Recalling Willis (1977) notion of anti-school culture as being more prevalent in the lower strata of the educational system, we suggest that this set of attitudes and the associated (low) expectancies of the future may mediate the association between educational level and work ethic. Young people from working class families, and generally, less privileged and poor youth show a keen notion of their changes of economic success. For them education is not a lever for promoting them through the career system. The notion of 'career' itself may be meaningless to them, as it reflects a strong middle-class bias on how to proceed through working life (e.g., Blustein, 2001; Richardson, 1993). Knowing that they probably are destined to the lower ranks of the occupational field, and that finding and holding onto a job may take effort, they armor themselves with a strong work ethic: one has to work at all costs, one has to work in order to get by, leisure is fine as long as one's occupational status is safe. Adolescents from the higher ranks of the educational system can afford to support more casual ideas about the worth and importance of work, because, to them integration in the higher parts of the occupational system is more or less obvious (ter Bogt, 1999).

During recent years there has been a noticeable trend towards declining cultural conservatism (Middendorp, 1991). This study confirms that the work ethic, on the other hand, is still alive. Although still embedded in cultural conservatism, there is a degree of tension between the work ethic and the traditionalist worldview. A good financial basis, i.e., a good job, was and is an indispensable precondition for pleasurable consumerism. Anyone who wishes to become a consumer experiences the duty to work, because consumer goals otherwise simply become impossible (Schorr, 1992; Peters, 2000, ter Bogt, 1999). As a result, what Weber once described as a religiously embedded value has now been modernized and generalized to become an instrumental motive. An attachment to consumerism is by no means limited to the decreasing group that cherishes conservative cultural attitudes. If consumption, based on hard work remains a salient social configuration, the work ethic will increasingly become dissociated from the domain of cultural conservatism. Work ethic, but without the traditional depreciative attitude towards leisure time, will continue to be a vital factor for large sectors of the population. Future research should track the developmental course of work ethic itself.

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